

# Seeking Help for a Struggling Reader: Eight Steps for Parents

The following are recommended steps to take:

“The more you learn,  
the less overwhelming  
it will seem and the  
more you’ll be able to  
act effectively.”

## 1. Find out if your child needs extra help

### **If your child is a preschooler, call Child Find**

Call the main office of your local school district and ask for the "Child Find" program. This federal program requires school districts to give preschoolers a comprehensive assessment for free if a problem is suspected.

### **If your child is in school, talk to his or her teacher**

Ask questions such as:

- Do you think my child is having trouble with reading?
- What specific trouble is my child having?
- What can I do to help my child at home?
- What can be done to help my child in class?
- Which reading group is my child in?
- How he or she doing is compared to other students?

### **Talk to your child's doctor**

Make sure your child's doctor or other health care provider checks your child for hearing or vision problems. Sometimes reading difficulties are caused by physical problems.

## 2. Consult with the school and other parents

### **Make an appointment to speak with your child's teacher**

The best thing that can happen is for parents, teachers, and other professionals to begin talking together to plan ways to help a child overcome or cope with his or her reading difficulties. You can be supportive at home while the teacher can accommodate your child's needs and work to increase his or her skills in the classroom. Together you can make sure the help a child receives out-of-school meshes with what's happening in school.

### **Talk with other parents**

Let others know about your concern. Your neighbor or friend might already have solved a problem similar to yours. In addition, at most schools, a group of parents meets regularly to talk about improving and supporting the school. This group is usually called the PTA or PTO, and they are sometimes quite effective.

## 3. Inform yourself of your options

### **Find out about IDEA**

There is a law – the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – that ensures that children diagnosed with a learning disability will receive special school services (for free).

### **Put things in writing**

As you go through the process of getting help for your child, be sure to keep a written record. Take notes and write down:

- The date and name of each person you meet with
- What you talked about
- What you decided.

Follow the chain of command. If you let your child's teacher know about a problem and nothing changes, try calling or writing again. Don't give up because then nothing will change. Then contact the child's guidance counselor, assistant principal, or principal. If you still need assistance, contact the office of the district administrator or superintendent.

### **4. Ask the school to evaluate your child**

#### **Send the school principal a written evaluation request**

Write a short letter to your child's principal to request that the school's specialists review your child's progress. This request will go to a "screening committee" at the school. This group decides whether a child should be checked for speech or language delays, attention deficit hyperactivity

disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, or other conditions that may be affecting how your child learns. If it is determined that your child needs extra help, the school may be able to provide this either in the child's regular classroom or with a specialist.

### **Make sure your child is evaluated in his or her strongest language**

It is important that your child is tested in the language he or she knows best. The purpose of such testing is to find out whether a child's reading problem is due to second language learning, language delay, or a learning disability.

### **5. Consider an evaluation from outside the school**

#### **Contact an independent expert**

If the school evaluates your child and you think you need a second opinion, consider going to a specialist outside of the school. They can do an "independent education evaluation."

#### **Contact your local parent center**

Your local Parent Training and Information Center or a Parent Resource Center can advise you on how to get a free "independent education evaluation."

- [www.raisingpecialkids.org](http://www.raisingpecialkids.org)  
5025 E Washington Street,  
Suite #204  
Phoenix, AZ 85034-2005  
Phone: 602-242-4366  
800 Number: 800-237-3007 (in AZ state only)

TTY: 602-242-4366

Fax: 602-242-4306

## 6. Consider a tutor

### See if you qualify for SES services

Under the No Child Left Behind act, parents can obtain "supplemental educational services" (i.e., tutoring) at no charge if students are from low-income families who remain in Title I schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years. Parents of eligible children can choose from a list of state-approved providers.

## 7. Support your child at home

### Provide academic support

Learning is hard work, especially when

a child struggles with reading. Although you don't want to put extra academic pressure on your

child, there are some effective things you can do to help him or her overcome or cope with reading difficulties.

### Provide emotional support

Probably the most important thing you can do as a parent is to let your child know how much you value him or her as a unique and special person! Self-esteem often takes a hit when children struggle with reading or school.

### References

McKeta, Pam. "Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers . Empowering Parents . Helpful Articles . Seeking Help for a Struggling Reader: Eight Steps for Parents | PBS." *PBS: Public Broadcasting Service*. Reading Rockets, n.d. Web. 3 Aug. 2011. <[http://www.pbs.org/launchingreaders/empowering/helpfularticles\\_1.htm](http://www.pbs.org/launchingreaders/empowering/helpfularticles_1.htm)

